

# **Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce**

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Press Release - For Immediate Release

## **Agriculture Commissioner Embraces New Program, Aims to Help Mississippi Catfish Producers**

Over recent years, Mississippi's pond raised catfish industry has remained the leader nationwide in production and processing in spite of unfavorable conditions in the environment and commodity markets forcing catfish prices below costs of production.

Today, Commissioner of Agriculture Lester Spell announced that the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce has entered into an agreement with USDA to assist catfish producers. The Agricultural Assistance Act of 2003 provides \$34 million nationwide for the inaugural Catfish Feed Assistance Program (CFAP) responding to adverse weather conditions and natural disaster that caused losses last year. In Mississippi, \$20 million will be disbursed to state catfish feed mills for the purpose of directly assisting catfish producers in offsetting producer losses.

"We welcome the assistance from USDA. Federal financial support of the catfish industry is arriving at a critical time," stated Spell. "The payment process will be carried out in a very smooth and speedy manner with funds provided to Mississippi feed mills, so producers can be credited for feed costs. We realize our producers need to recover losses now."

The USDA program allocates funds to the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce to provide monies to five Mississippi feed mills. Feed mills will credit producers based on feed purchased in the 2002 production year. Spell said there are no administration costs included, so \$20 million in its entirety will be redeemable in feed credits.

"This program offers a temporary sigh of relief to our catfish industry. Catfish has had a very positive effect on the state economy but is currently facing adversity. We will do anything in our power to assist the industry and guarantee consumers that they will receive a clean, quality product," Spell said.

For more information on the CFAP or to receive a program application, please contact the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce at 601-359-1100 or a local feed mill.